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LAKE TSANA

The British Government has been historically interested in the regulation of the waters of Lake Tsana as a means of increasing the supply of water available for the Gezira district in the Sudan. Discussions in the 1920's between the British Government and the Ethiopian Government regarding the possibilities of such a project were unsuccessful, one of the principal difficulties being that Lake Tsana contains several islands and littoral areas on which Coptic shrines are built and which would be flooded in the event that a barrage were erected. This fact gained the opposition of the Coptic Church and, in addition to other factors, prompted the Ethiopian Government to refuse permission. In the late 20's and early 30's, however, the Ethiopian Government did agree to surveys which were carried out by an American firm, the J. G. White Engineering Company, in 1930-31 and 1933-34 regarding the practicability of this project. In May 1935 an agreement was actually reached between the Egyptian and Sudan Governments in regard to the diversion of water to be made available and the cost of the project. Proposals were then initiated by the Emperor of Ethiopia for a conference at Addis Ababa to clinch matters but the Italo-Ethiopian war intervened and the project remained in abeyance during the Italian occupation.

It is interesting to note that some students of the Nile have long believed that Lake Tsana is in certain respects the key to the Nile problem and that the diversion of the water from Lake Tsana away from the Nile could create a situation which would make the Nile valley practically uninhabitable. The Germans are reported to have developed a plan during the first World War for dynamiting the Blue Nile and diverting the water of Lake Tsana into other Ethiopian rivers flowing into the Red Sea. During the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, some British officials were apprehensive lest the Italians undertake a similar project. At the beginning of the century there was a similar fear that the Ethiopians might divert the waters of Lake Tsana. However, in the Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty of 1902 the Emperor of Ethiopia undertook "not to construct or allow to be constructed any work across the Blue Nile, Lake Tsana or the Sobat River which would arrest the flow of their waters into the Nile except in agreement with His Britannic Majesty's Government and the Government of the Sudan".

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